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University of Montana

NEWS RELEASE

Office of News and Publications
Missoula, MT 59812
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December 26, 1990

NEW EQUIPMENT EASES UM COMPUTER CRUNCH

MISSOULA --

The University of Montana will enter the new year with a new mainframe computer as the first step in a long-range, \$2.5 million computer plan that will replace inadequate equipment, automate library functions and establish computer networking between campus departments.

Faced with an urgent need to boost computer capacity in time for winter quarter registration, UM has contracted with Digital Equipment Corporation to purchase two new mainframe computers, Sylvia Weisenburger, acting vice president for administration and finance, said.

The first DEC 6510 arrived on campus last week and is expected to be operating in time to help ease the campus computing load during registration, Jan. 7. The second mainframe is scheduled for delivery in mid-January, and all UM computer functions should be transferred to the new machines by the end of winter quarter, UM Computer Center Director Steve Henry said.

The new equipment will increase UM's computing capacity, and the speed of computer transactions, by about 250 percent, Henry said. That improvement is essential, Weisenburger said, noting that inadequacies of the equipment being replaced forced the University to limit users of accounting and student services software to half-day access during fall quarter. That arrangement kept UM systems operating, she said, but at less than half of the needed pace.

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The two new mainframes, plus an array of equipment to meet faculty computing needs, will cost approximately \$1.4 million, Weisenburger said, estimating the total cost of planned computer system improvements -- including networking and library automation -- at \$2.5 million or less over five years. Payments will not begin until the 1991-92 fiscal year, she said.

The funds will come from a variety of university sources, she said, including the recent sale of University-owned properties, substantial savings on system maintenance, an anticipated federal grant, donations toward library automation and UM's general fund.

The academic components of UM's computer plan will be identified by the computer users' advisory committee, which surveyed faculty members to determine their needs and will report its recommendations this winter. Those recommendations are expected to address personal computers, networking, work stations and central computing support, Henry said.

Another long-sought feature of UM's new computer package will be library automation. Karen Hatcher, acting dean of library services, said the necessary hardware and software should be purchased by the end of this academic year. Once the automation process is completed, she said, computer users will be able to access the library circulation system day or night to find out what books, videos or other materials the library has on any given subject.

"This will make the library easier and faster to use, so it will be used more," Hatcher said.

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